

Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System  
**POLICY COMMITTEE**  
State of Alaska, DOT&PF, Main Conference Room  
2301 Peger Road Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

Meeting Minutes – January 21, 2009

**1. Call to Order**

Vice-Chair Luke Hopkins called the meeting to order at 10:05 am.

**2. Introduction of Members and Attendees**

The following were present:

- \* FMATS Policy Committee members
- \*\* FMATS Staff members
- \*\*\* FMATS Technical Committee members

Name	Representing
* Jerry Rafson	Steve Titus, P.E. (absent)
* Mayor Terry Strle	City of Fairbanks
* Mayor Jim Whitaker	Fairbanks North Star Borough
* Mayor Doug Isaacson	City of North Pole
* Luke Hopkins	FNSB Assembly Representative
* Chad Roberts	Fairbanks City Council Rep.
* Alice Edwards	ADEC Acting Director, Air Quality Division
*** Donna Gardino	FMATS Coordinator
*** Joan Hardesty	DEC, Air Quality
*** Mike Schmetzer	City of Fairbanks
*** Bob Pristash	City of Fairbanks
*** Ethan Birkholz	DOT&PF, Planning Manager
** Todd Boyce	FNSB Planning
** Margaret Carpenter	DOT&PF, Transportation Planner
** Tara Callear	FMATS, Planner
Ron King	DOT&PF, HQ
Pete Christensen	DOT&PF, HQ
Katherine Steingham	Eielson Air Force Base
Jerry Colp	City of Fairbanks
Randy Zarnkey	Resident, City of Fairbanks
David Leone	DOT&PF
Guy Satley	Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly
Dermott Cole	Fairbanks Daily News Miner
Meadow Bailey	DOT&PF Public Information Officer
Jo Schlotfeldt	DOT&PF
Mary Pagel	URS, Alaska

**3. Public Comments**

Randy Zarnkey spoke of interest in the agenda item of winter sidewalk maintenance. He thinks that plowing sidewalks is good, but disagrees with putting it in the street. He lives in Island Homes subdivision where there is often snow accumulation in the streets. He disagrees with the fact that it is against the law for residents to put the snow into the streets, while the governmental agencies continue to do it. He suggests that the crews move the snow onto the lawn.

He also is interested in the 3<sup>rd</sup> street upgrade and widening. He wanted a general status update of what he referenced as a 20 year old project. Luke Hopkins stated that it would be addressed as a later agenda item.

10:09 Mayor Strle has joined the meeting

**4. Approval of the January 21, 2009 Agenda**

- **MOTION:** to approve the January 21, 2009 agenda. (Isaacson/Edwards) No opposition. Approved.

**5. Approval of November 26, 2008 Policy Committee minutes**

- **MOTION:** to approve the November 26, 2008 minutes. (Edwards/Isaacson) No opposition. Approved.

**6. Committee Reports**

**a) FMATS Coordinator / Technical Committee Report**

Donna Gardino introduced new FMATS staff member Tara Callear to the committee and thanked those at DOT&PF, including Jo Schlotfeldt, Ethan Birkholz and Margaret Carpenter, for their assistance during the transition.

Donna reported on her meeting with the Interior Delegation regarding FMATS and our priorities, including the Fairbanks Area project needs to support construction of a natural gas pipeline. There were approximately 20-30 people in the audience and good representation from the legislature.

Donna also stated that Representative Guttenberg and a Boy Scout Troop requested a meeting to talk with FMATS about the Gold Hill Bike path and its inclusion in the FMATS 2009-2012 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The Boy Scouts are interested in working to get this project moved up in the TIP and will be collecting petition signatures. Donna noted that it is the highest scoring Bike/Pedestrian project currently in the TIP.

Donna reported on the Sidewalk Summit Meeting that Mike Schmetzer, City of Fairbanks (COF), organized. Representatives from the COF, DOT&PF and the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) came together to look at current efforts, gaps in maintenance, and how to become more efficient. Additional interests will be involved at the next meeting when a map of the currently maintained sidewalks will be examined.

Donna reported that FHWA requested a list of Economic Stimulus projects which she sent.

Donna referenced a later agenda item regarding a resolution that FMATS had written, supporting a roundabout at Airport Way and Cushman. Donna reported spending time training Tara.

Donna also referenced a summary included in the packet after the staff report. The summary is an expense report for the first quarter of 2009.

Mayor Isaacson commended Donna on her presentation to the Interior Delegation. Donna thanked DOT&PF for helping to prepare for the presentation. Luke also thanked Donna and Tara for the work during this busy time.

**7. Old Business.**  
None

**8. New Business**

**a) PM 2.5 Non-Attainment Designation and Boundary Update**

Donna said that the much of the area within the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) boundary is a newly designated Non-Attainment (NA) area for PM 2.5. Donna referenced the maps in the packet that show the MPO boundary and the boundary of the EPA designated NA area.

Alice Edwards reported that DEC was ultimately successful in negotiating with EPA to create a smaller boundary for the NA area that did not include Eielson Air Force base and other outlying areas. An air quality plan must now be developed for the community. DEC and the borough have been collecting data in preparation for this plan using Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding made available through FMATS. The process will continue with the plan due in 2012 with attainment by 2014. Donna added that FMATS expects more CMAQ funding in the future due to this NA area designation.

Chad Roberts asked for clarification on the timeline and Alice responded that the FNSB and the State of Alaska has 3 years to develop a plan and 2 years to come into attainment. If at that point attainment was not reached, then the process would revert to planning. Jerry Rafson asked when the clock starts. Alice replied that it starts when the rules become effective in March or April of 2009, 3 months after the federal register.

Luke asked about Juneau's potential designation and its role. Alice reported that DEC is currently looking at the data which may permit them to be removed from the NA list, but it is not yet clear. Juneau also had exceedances during the recent cold snap so the State of Alaska and the City of Juneau are reviewing the data.

Alice explained the process of data collection, what controls exist, the cost of controls, the sources and public process on the local, state and federal level. There will be plenty of opportunity for public comment.

Chad asked if the State and FNSB have been working for several years, then are they ahead of schedule with a first run of a plan. Alice said that work has been done from the technical perspective and that they are working in advance of the schedule, but there is still a lot to be done. They are in a good position with the technical information which will form the policy choices that need to be made.

Luke asked what the impact would be on projects that are moving forward, such as the road projects in the economic stimulus, since there is no conformity plan in place yet. Alice answered that there is a grace period before the conformity kicks in. She stated that after a certain period of time the conformity requirements for the TIP will kick in and ultimately a budget will be formed.

Mayor Isaacson asked about the \$2.6 million being spent on these studies and if the window of time would have any effect on the completion of the 2 year study. Mayor Whitaker stated that it has been about a year and a half and it would take at least 2 years to complete. About a half-year of data was collected this year; a full year will be collected this year, and then the remaining half-year next year. This will provide the data sufficient to complete the database and allow for plan. A preliminary plan is expected, but the form is undetermined as of yet.

Mayor Isaacson asked about the window. Alice said that the conformity window is just a federal regulatory requirement for when the NA has to become incorporated into the planning.

**b) FMATS Allocation and Formula Review**

Luke introduced Ron King, DOT&PF who presented to the FMATS Policy Committee the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for FFY09 & Beyond. Ron covered in detail the following

- MPO Allocation Formula and how the FMATS allocation compares to the rest of the state. The formula takes into consideration factors such as population, traffic accidents, traffic congestion, number of lane miles, etc.
- Rescission. In SAFETEA-LU it calls for a \$55 or \$81 million rescission. The potential for repeal was discussed. If the rescission is the larger number, \$19 million in flexible projects should be expected to be delayed and replaced by projects that employ inflexible apportionments.
- 2010-2013 STIP Schedule was presented along with the estimated funding.
- Economic Stimulus: Expectations at this time for the state are ~\$30 billion for surface transportation and \$8 billion for transit.
- GO Bond Funding: Bonds may be more than one bond sale based on anticipated cash flow. Revenue working on bond package structure. Some projects may be allowed to start early.

**c) South Cushman Improvements 1:17:16**

Donna reported she wrote a letter to the DOT stating that the Technical Committee wanted to review the draft technical memorandum regarding a roundabout at the Airport Way and Cushman Street intersection. After review, the Technical Committee felt that it is important that the roundabout design alternative be given equal consideration during the Environmental Analysis (EA) phase due to safety and air quality considerations. The Technical Committee drafted a resolution (included in packet) expressing these opinions and they also recommend that the Policy Committee sign this resolution and forward it on to the DOT. Donna emphasized the accident reduction, fatal crash reduction statistics of roundabouts.

Luke asked for confirmation that is in fact a state project within the FMATS area. He also asked if there were any obligations for FMATS funding. Donna answered that she asked the state about any financial implications. Jerry inserted that the financial implications are not yet clear. He briefed the committee on the history of the project and the resulting mixture of funds from National Highway System (NHS) funds and Community Transportation Program (CTP) funds that resulted from this. There is not a clean divide, but most of this project should qualify as an NHS project, although this has not yet been confirmed by the DOT & PF headquarters.

Luke asked for clarification on the point that Jerry made, asking if this was in fact about the intersection portion of this project. Jerry confirmed this and added that this is a "time trap" project meaning that the federal government requires timely completion of the project or it must be paid back. And that the EA is not yet done so there is more time involved in completing this project. The Vision Fairbanks study called for a roundabout. DOT has been looking at this from a traffic perspective, noting that a multi-lane or three-lane roundabout has been shown to work at this intersection. In addition, neighboring intersections were examined to evaluate the effect of a roundabout on their traffic patterns. Noble is not likely to need to be changed now, but would be recommended for the future. The signal at Gaffney would likely have to move to 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue to eliminate some queuing issues. There are some right-of-way implications beyond what is required for a signalized intersection. For example the Thrifty Liquor Store would need to be removed.

Others potentially affected would be Drop In Café and Sombbrero. Rocket Surplus and the Greyhound Lounge were already slated to be impacted.

Mayor Strle asked if this resolution is only asking for consideration. Jerry confirmed and added that from the DOT perspective, they are willing to go there and that there is a policy that DOT look at roundabouts as an option when putting in signalized intersections.

- **MOTION:** To approve Resolution 2009-02. (Whitaker/Strle) None opposed. Approved.

Comments: Chad pointed out the redundancy of the effort based on the fact that DOT already has a policy to evaluate roundabouts as an alternative to signalized intersections. Jerry stated his opinion that FMATS opinion in the matter could be useful. Donna added that it also puts FMATS putting it on public records, adding more weight. Chad restated his question asking how this resolution is different that stating that a roundabout is simply what FMATS wants. Chad stated his thought that it is actually calling for more than an evaluation since an evaluation is already being called for. Jerry said that there is a lot more evaluation to be completed from a historical perspective, cost estimates and public comment.

Luke asked if DOT would currently give the roundabout alternative full consideration or would this or would it be just a brief look. Donna answered that is the risk we face and FMATS Policy Committee support would help to ensure that it is not overlooked in favor of traditional solutions. Jerry agreed that he would appreciate having FMATS on record and that it would not commit anyone to anything. He believes that expresses a sentiment.

Mayor Strle asked if a blanket recommendation is appropriate from the committee stating that it favors roundabouts where feasible. Donna answered that this is a roundabout recommended in the Vision Fairbanks and since Vision Fairbanks has been adopted by the COF and the FNSB, we should give it consideration. Luke asked about DOT's practice on evaluating the impact on other traffic operations and Jerry confirmed that it would work. Mike Schmetzer commented that the move of the traffic signal from Gaffney to 12<sup>th</sup> would be a benefit to the Emergency Response and is favored by the Fire Chief.

#### **d) North Pole Citywide Pavement Rehabilitation**

Donna said that Mayor Isaacson requested that this be brought before the Policy Committee with an explanation as to why if it was going to be in the design phase in 2009 that it would take until 2011 to go into construction phase.

Ethan said that after design starts it should take a year. He is not clear as to why it says 2 years. He thinks that dirt should be turned in 2010. Mayor Isaacson said that he has a problem with that explanation, because essentially there is 2 years of design, like Homestead Road. He expressed concern over the lag time and the inflation that is factored which results in an increased cost and reduces the overall amount of pavement that can be rehabilitated.

Ethan clarified that if the construction begins in 2010, then the prices are locked in to 2010 prices. The process has to be followed regardless of the complexity of the project and that that is the normal timeline to expect.

Mayor Isaacson commented on the effect on the operation of the refinery and how even 2010 is not soon enough. Ethan reminded Mayor Isaacson that the project has not even started yet.

Mayor Isaacson continued to make his point by saying that the inflation cost reduces the scope of the project from North Alaska Blvd and H and H as well as others, and now it might get squeezed down further.

Ethan reminded Mayor Isaacson of the potential issues such as raising grade and slope, and that it is not just a simple project because it focuses on many unique streets. Mayor Isaacson mentioned the Economic Stimulus.

Ethan said that there are other issues as well, including DOT being short staffed.

Luke asked if this topic should be talked about in further depth at the next meeting. Mayor Isaacson further emphasize that this is a Preventative Maintenance (PM) not a road reconstruction. He stated that he does not want to further delay the project and he hopes to move it to 2009 and put it out there in October. He does not want to see the delay to 2011.

Luke recommended that Mayor Isaacson take this up further with DOT directly as all the information needed might not be present and that if there were any action to be taken it could be brought back to committee. Donna offered to stay on top of the situation as well.

Mayor Isaacson said that it is an action item because it is in the TIP. He asked for clarification on Luke's recommendation to take it up with DOT and for clarification on whether or not it was an action item currently. Luke replied that to his understanding it is an informational item on the agenda.

Donna inserted that it is an earmark project so when it is ready it can go in whatever year it is ready. This money can only be spent on this project. It will be spent on this project when it is ready. If it is ready in 2010 it will happen in 2010. Mayor Isaacson said that it is the "if" and "when" statements that concern him. Luke concluded by saying that Mayor Isaacson could continue working on this to try and move it forward.

**e) Winter Sidewalk Summit Meeting**

Donna stated that the resulting sub committee's work will compile the current maintenance data on a map and look for ways to do the current work more efficiently and more collaboratively. FMATS is taking the lead on this because of the need for coordination between the entities. An additional goal will be to find additional funding to support future improvements and to purchase equipment. High traffic and other priority concerns will be addressed. Safe Routes to School will be another consideration.

**f) Illinois Street Reconstruction—Barnette Bridge**

Donna said that DOT requested this action item be on the agenda and it is to accelerate the construction of the Illinois Street Barnette Bridge reconstruction to allow the construction to occur in 2009. The reason is the right-of-way is already purchased, and it would be winter work on the Chena River, grandfathering funds can be used this year and it is a distinct piece of work separate from the rest of the project.

Donna asked if the intent is to use just grandfathering funds. Ethan said that it is unknown. It could be eligible for the second set of stimulus but the intent is to just use the grandfathering funds. It currently cannot be put out to bid in the 90 day timeline. Donna said that basically this would allow the bridge to be built in 2009.

Ethan said there are distinct advantages to starting ahead. It is a separate chunk of work that could go to work in 2009 and use some of grandfathering funds while improving the overall

timeline of the Illinois Street Reconstruction project. Alice asked if this is the same item that is shown in the packet for the Economic Stimulus. Donna said yes but when that list was developed, it was thought there would be a 120 day window. It is unknown what time frame the window will be for economic stimulus projects.

Mayor Whitaker asked about the Economic Stimulus and if it would make other funds available. He asked if that is irrelevant now given the timeline. Donna answered yes because it was thought that with 120 days, the Barnette Street Bridge could be funded from the Economic Stimulus package, but it is expected that the best that could be done is to get half the Stimulus funding.

**MOTION:** To accelerate the Barnette Bridge portion of the Illinois Street Reconstruction project to allow construction of the bridge to begin in 2009. time approve. (Whitaker/Isaacson) None opposed. Approved.

Comments:

Luke asked a question on the funding piece of it. He asked specifically about the timing on the design. Ethan said that the design is very far along. Ethan said that Dave Bloom said that it could go out to bid this summer but could not meet the 90 day timeline. Luke asked if the design goes to the bridge design part or are there a few approaches.

Ethan said that it would be just the bridge, none of the utilities. The demo for Sampson's Hardware would have to be done, which there is potential conflict there. There is winter work in the river which could be initiated this winter 2009 which save a lot time. He said that currently in the TIP, it shows \$12 million. This would salvage some of the grandfather money; these being the benefits.

Mayor Isaacson asked what the benefit is if this does not qualify for the Economic Stimulus because of the timeline. Ethan said it is just a way of getting another project into 2009 when the rest of Illinois Street is waiting on a significant amount of right-of-way.

Mayor Isaacson asked if this gets moved up if any other project was going to be bumped out. Ethan said no. Chad commented that the acceleration simply allows us to initiate the bridge before the reconstruction of Illinois Street. Chad asked about the ROW issues; could this present issues that could potentially get us ahead of ourselves by building the bridge in advance. Ethan discussed the challenge of ROW and confirmed for Chad that there are no unknowns and this is a taking process.

## 9. Public Comments

Guy Satley addressed Alice regarding DEC and PM 2.5. He commented about how studies have shown PM 2.5 has been ramping up over the 3-5 past years. He referenced the IM program and its potential cancellation and he questioned this in light of the NA status.

Alice commented that when CO plan was submitted last spring, this was looked at and considered at this time and are now waiting on EPA to respond which would then allow the IM program to be discontinued and moved into the contingency.

Mr. Satley asked about EPA and questioned their awareness of the 2 issues combined and their interrelatedness. Alice responded that EPA had not stated an opinion. Donna read a public comment letter regarding Peridot Road (on file).

## 10. Other Issues

Luke asked for information on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street issue that was raised in the first session of the public comment. Donna said that she does not have any current information and that it is a DOT project. Ethan commented that 3<sup>rd</sup> and Steese Highway is still in the appraisal acquisition process. Luke asked about the STIP and that it shows funding. Ethan said that construction funding is not showing yet. It is expected that the right-of-way will take a year or two.

## **12. Informational Items**

### **a. Northern Rail Extension (NRE)- Draft EIS Public Comment**

Donna stated that the public meetings are over, but the comment period ends Feb 2. A letter has been drafted commenting on the draft EIS. It was recognized that the NRE increases rail traffic in town and therefore prompted the letter. Donna summarized that the letter states that the Policy Committee does support the NRE however recognizes the impact on the MPO due to the increased rail traffic.

**MOTION:** To approve the signing of the NRE- Draft EIS comment letter as amended. (Isaacson/Whitaker) None opposed. Approved.

**Amendment to Motion:** An amendment to make changes to the letter were discussed and incorporated. (Roberts/Isaacson). None opposed. Approved.

Comments:

Jerry pointed out a grammatical correction.

Mayor Isaacson asked about whether the language should be changed to say that the "Policy Committee strongly urges the development". He mentioned the possible inclusion of language about the reduction of crossings and the importance of the funding and possibly inserting the language that it is a phased development.

### **a. TIP Conformity Update/Draft TIP**

Donna reported that the DOT has issued an RFP and is negotiating with Sierra Research. Donna asked Margaret Carpenter about how long the TIP conformity process would take. Margaret said that we are still waiting for the timeline. Donna emphasized the importance of the conformity because it is necessary for putting out the Draft 2009-2012 TIP and assured the committee that Sierra Research is aware of the urgency. Luke asked about the changes to the second Draft TIP and if the project change would affect conformity.

Donna said that the Draft TIP will be made available to Sierra Research in order for them to do the conformity analysis and that the illustrative and the Stimulus projects will be added prior to this process.

### **b. Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)**

Donna reported that the DOT is in the final negotiations with the consultant and FMATS plans to meet with consultant to finalize the scope of services. Donna stated that there could be some issues with getting an LRTP done in time to be SAFETEA-LU compliant, as our current LRTP conformity expires in August 2009. Luke asked that Donna keep the committee informed on this process. Donna confirmed.

### **b. Annual Listing of Obligated Projects**

Donna referenced the packet to the FFY08 Annual Listing of Obligated Projects which is a required document under SAFETEA-LU that gives better transparency to the public. This is posted to the website.



**c. Economic Stimulus Projects**

Donna reported that she sent a list of projects to Luke to then be forwarded on as requested by Senator Mark Begich. Luke stated that Donna had forwarded FMATS Economic Stimulus projects to FHWA and then Luke said he heard questions from federal congressional delegation as to what FMATS may have for projects. They had heard of the projects even though it is not an earmark rather a formula-driven process. Luke requested that they be put in the appropriate format and Donna passed those along as requested. Members of interior delegation also inquired about FMATS and their Economic Stimulus projects and Luke said that these forms may very well work for keeping them informed as well.

Bob Pristash asked about the Economic Stimulus project timeline. Specifically he noted that the Wendell Street Bridge earlier was economized and he sees this as an opportunity to bring the design features back as part of the Economic Stimulus funding.

Donna asked about the timeline. Bob thinks because it is ready to advertise, the design features are mostly completed and could easily be brought back which could bring another approximately \$1 million more in projects to the FMATS Economic Stimulus package.

Donna asked if a contract can be awarded in 90 days. Bob said that the design is now at the DOT and the bid package be ready to go. Bob asked if the Policy Committee would need to make the ultimate decision on this and Donna said yes and that it could be taken up further in coordination with state. The process of bringing it back was discussed. Jerry asked Bob how long it would take to get it done. Bob said 3 weeks. Luke said that it could be taken up when Steve Titus returns as Chair. In the meantime the Technical Committee could act on this at the next meeting and illustrate what this money is being spent on.

- **MOTION:** To increase the Wendell Street Bridge project to its original capacity if it could meet the design schedule necessary to qualify it for Economic Stimulus funding.  
(Rafson/Isaacson) None opposed. Approved.

**12. Adjourn**

**Motion to Adjourn.** Adjourned at 12:15 pm.

**Next Scheduled Policy Committee Meeting is February 18, 2009, 10:00 am at DOT&PF, 2301 Peger Road.**

Approved:

  
Steve Titus, P.E., Chair  
FMATS Policy Committee

Date:

2/18/09